The Link Between Attachment Disorder & Human Trafficking

By: Denene Yates, Sharon Fuller and Kate Oliver, LCSW-C
A. Markedly disturbed and developmentally inappropriate social relatedness in most contexts, beginning before age five years, as evidenced by either (1) or (2):

(1) persistent failure to initiate or respond in a developmentally appropriate fashion to most social interactions as manifest by excessively inhibited, hyper vigilant, or highly ambivalent and contradictory responses (e.g., the child may respond to caregivers with a mixture of approach, avoidance, and resistance to comforting, or may exhibit frozen watchfulness)
(2) diffuse attachments as manifest by indiscriminate sociability with marked inability to exhibit appropriate selective attachments (e.g., excessive familiarity with relative strangers or lack of selectivity in choice of attachment figures)

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV)
Bowlby’s Attachment Theory:

1. A child has an innate (i.e. inborn) **need to attach** to one main attachment figure

2. A child should receive the **continuous care** of this single most important attachment figure for approximately the first two years of life.
3. The long term consequences of maternal deprivation might include the following:
   - delinquency,
   - reduced intelligence,
   - increased aggression,
   - depression,
   - affectionless psychopathy

4. The child’s attachment relationship with their primary caregiver leads to the development of an internal working model.
Children with secure attachments believe:

- The world is a safe, good place most of the time.
- They can count on adults to meet their needs.
- If they have a problem, there are people who will help them with it.
- Their choices make a difference.
- They matter to other people. They are loveable.
- If they try hard enough, they can accomplish things that will bring them success and happiness.
Five Developmental Stages

(Source: Growing Up Again By Jean Clarke & Connie Dawson & Getting the Love You Want By Harville Hendrix)

1. Attachment: Conception – 2 years - Sense of Being
2. Exploration: 1 year – 3 years – Sense of Well-being
3. Identity: 3 years – 5 years - Sense of Self
4. Competence: 5 years – 8 years – Sense of Self-worth
5. Relationship: 8 years – 12 years – Sense of Self-acceptance
Internal Messages for Healthy Development

Birth to age Three:
- I am wanted
- I am welcomed
- It is safe to grow, be born, and to live
- I am cared for
- I exist
- I am loveable
- I am safe
- My needs are important and will be met
- I can be separate
- I can explore my world
- I am celebrated when I discover new things
Internal Messages for Healthy Development:

Three Years to Five Years
- I am OK as I am
- I am important
- I can discover who I am

Ages Five to Eight
- I am adequate
- I can know what I can do

Eight to Twelve Years:
- I am accepted
- I belong
- I am likeable
To be “good enough” a parent needs a combination of the following:

- the understanding that from the eyes of a child, “I am who I think you think I am.”
- attunement.
- to be a “safe holding environment” for mind and body.
- The Still Face Experiment – A Video
The inability to see the usefulness of caregivers. The worldview that people are not trustworthy or caring. The belief that “I need to meet my own needs.” The belief that my choices do not make a difference to anyone else.
Risk factors for insecure/disorganized attachment:

- Depression or mental illness in primary caregiver while the child was young
- Multiple changes in caregivers at a young age
- Child has a serious medical issue that prevents bonding
- Parent has a serious medical issue that prevents them from caring for child consistently
- Parental addiction
- Child is in foster care, or was adopted at an older age (older than 18 months)
- Child has a history of trauma from a young age
RAD is frequently seen in children who have inconsistent, abusive, or neglectful care in their early childhood, including children adopted from orphanages or foster care.

Neglect

1. Absence of experience
2. Mistiming of experience
3. Chaotic exposure of experience

Bruce Perry, PhD.
Up to 90% of Sex Trafficking Victims experience sexual abuse first in the home. Many are from foster care.
25% grew up without a mother in the house
59% grew up without a father in the house
40% someone died in their home while they were growing up
22% the person who raised them leave for more than one year
33% someone in the household incarcerated
27% someone in the home had a major illness or disability
62% someone in the home was frequently hit, slapped, pushed
40% someone in the home was kicked, beaten, raped, threatened and/or attacked with a weapon
83% drug or alcohol abuse in home
86% used drugs or alcohol themselves
56% ran away from home at least once, mean age 13
28% were told to leave home by parent or guardian, mean age 15
33% someone in home in prostitution regularly
71% people in the neighborhood or friends in prostitution regularly
71% someone suggested to them they should become a prostitute
65 – 80% victims of child sexual abuse, rape, or incest
50 – 75% victims of physical abuse as a child

Note: the parents of RAD children and Sex Trafficked children have the same family issues
Children who do not get the crucial internal messages they need are left feeling:

- Insignificant
- Small
- Devalued
- Worthless
- Powerless

Sex Trafficked Victims report that they lack internal Healthy Development Messages which makes them more vulnerable to be trafficked and re-trafficked.
To the child whose emotional needs are not met, the world is unsafe and terrifying. Their life feels out of control. If they are to survive, they need to develop skills to cope with their environment.

They become:

- Self absorbed
- Self centered
- Controlling
- Survivors
Because these children feel unlovable, they become more venerable to traffickers and less able to discern safe and unsafe people. Love becomes the primary need at any cost.
When a child is neglected and abused, his brain develops in survival mode, or style, to help him stay safe. When a child is “wired” for survival, it results in being anxious, acting from instinct instead of reason, and not being able to easily identify his feelings.

Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Victims are wired for survival at any cost. Many start off as runaways and are lured into trafficking because of their need to attach. The trafficker provides basic needs (food, clothes, shelter) for survival
These images illustrate the negative impact of **neglect** on the developing brain. In the CT scan on the left is an image from a healthy three year old with an average head size. The image on the right is from a three year old child suffering from **severe sensory-deprivation neglect**. This child’s brain is significantly smaller than average and has abnormal development of cortex.
Effect of extreme deprivation

Healthy Child

Neglected Child
Reactive Attachment Disorder Symptoms

- Superficially engaging and charming
- Indiscriminately affectionate with strangers
- Destructive to material things and self
- Lack of cause and effect thinking
- Stealing
- Not taking any responsibility for actions (blame shifting)
- Crazy lying about the obvious
- Trouble with peer relationships
- Lack of conscience
- Cruelty to animals
RAD children do not display every symptom.
There were 408,425 children in foster care in the US as of September 30, 2010.

Children in foster care have an average of three placements.

Depending on the city 50-80% of children victims of human trafficking are, or have been in the foster care system.
Relationship between RAD and Sex Trafficking

Many emotional and behavioral characteristics are similar in children with RAD and Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Victims.

It appears a correlation can be made between children who have RAD and Human Trafficking victims, as Traffickers exploit and prey on the vulnerable.

The need to attach to a person is inborn and needs to be met. That need if unmet does not disappear but becomes a stronger need. The teen with RAD has less ability to differentiate safe from unsafe people and is in survival mode all the time.

Research is needed to determine the correlation between children who have RAD and Human Trafficking Victims.
Five Ways to help move someone from victim to survivor:

1. Create an environment of safety.
2. Help them to attach to someone in the family (if possible).
3. Help them attach to a surrogate family if necessary.
4. Address the worthless and unlovable place by teaching value, worth and future possibilities in this world.
5. Help clients with self forgiveness.